

Current Developments

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Message from the State Conservationist

Now that we are fully into a new year, I think it is important to take a look back at all we have accomplished in 2008 to put conservation on the private lands of Tennessee. Here are just a few of the obstacles you overcame:

- Budget deficit through ten months of the fiscal year.
- EQIP signup and ranking during Christmas 2007.
- Continuing resolutions throughout the year, some only for a period of two weeks at a time.
- Reduced vital staff with more work to get done.
- Ongoing contract cleanup.
- A new farm bill that took 27 actions by Congress and the President to get it passed.
- Additional EQIP, WHIP, and WRP funds to obligate.
- Realignment of areas.
- Goals, goals, goals.
- Tornadoes and droughts.

But through it all, you helped obligate more conservation program dollars, made more payments to producers, and put more conservation on the ground than ever before in Tennessee NRCS history.

When we started FY09 we thought that there would be a chance to catch-up, but then the great NRCS Open Obligation Audit hit like an ice storm bringing all of our other services to a screeching halt. We all knew that this needed to be done, but of course the timing was terrible. However, the worst thing that could happen is for us to go through this audit process and not learn something. This will be an ongoing effort, but there are ways we will deal with the issues and get more money for conservation on the ground. Some of the solutions will be to:

1. Shorten the lifespan of the contracts.
2. Bring the cost share rate for EQIP to 75%.
3. Have the landowner prepared to apply the practices as soon as the contract is signed.
(Have all permits, designs, etc. ready before the contract is signed.)
4. Finally, we need to do clearly communicate the program responsibilities of the landowner to them before they sign the contract, especially the Appendix.

Throughout the year each of you took on your responsibility and even offered to help out others. You put \$40 million of conservation on the land. Our partnerships with Soil Conservation Districts, RC&D Councils, and Tennessee Department of Agriculture were strengthened.

We experienced tragedy in the past year as well. The death of Tommy Hunt was a shock, and his friends and colleagues in the State Office and around the state will mourn the loss for years to come. Please continue to remember his family in your thoughts and prayers.

We made progress, whether experiencing joy, sadness, success, or difficult challenges. I want each of you to know you have my appreciation for a job well done. I thoroughly enjoy going out to our offices and seeing our people proudly wearing our NRCS logo. That raindrop and keeping it close to where it falls on the earth symbolizes everything we do. For all the hard work that you did this year for our customers, the land, and NRCS, I am grateful.

Kevin

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In Memoriam

Tommy Lee Hunt

September 29, 1958—October 24, 2008



Tommy's NRCS family will always appreciate his smile, his engaging personality, and his deep commitment to the NRCS mission of helping people help the land. Helping people was a priority for Tommy, and he could be counted on to tackle any task or perform any duty that contributed to that mission. Whether he was creating maps, taking photos, shooting video, or leading the entertainment at the All Employees Meeting, Tommy strived for excellence, and he always achieved it.

The NRCS family mourn his loss and we count ourselves fortunate to have worked with such a kind and honorable man. a



Wiley B. Scott Retires After 50 Years with the Agency

Wiley Scott began working for the NRCS (then the Soil Conservation Service) on November 17, 1958. He was fresh out of Auburn University where he received a degree in agricultural engineering. The north Alabama native began his work as a roving survey party leader at the Jackson, Tennessee area office. A year later he came to the State Office in Nashville where he was been a vital and enthusiastic presence for the past 49 years.

Over the course of the past five decades, Wiley became Tennessee's foremost expert on dam construction and maintenance. He is the 'go-to' guy when other engineers are having difficulty with a problem design or project. "I have a knack for solving problems," Wiley says. "I've always enjoyed picking up the newest technology and systematically finding solutions."

The 72-year old Wiley says his job changed dramatically in the past half-century. "Hydraulics for an average dam used to take two to three weeks. These days with a computer I can do a half-dozen of them in a couple of days." Wiley kept a file for every dam he's ever worked on, and he keeps a handwritten table of the projects dating back to 1958.

One of those projects would have led to catastrophe without Wiley's quick thinking and persuasive techniques. Several years ago, heavy rains in west Tennessee resulted in a dam break. Another dam was about to break, but Wiley was on the scene and got a backhoe to the site. However, the equipment operator said the water was running too fast and he couldn't do anything to help. Wiley quickly devised a plan to build a horse-shoe shaped dyke around the break causing the water to slow down in the newly formed gulley. That held the flooding back and allowed engineers to fix the break. Wiley's knowledge of the hydraulics of the spillway stopped the flood in its tracks.

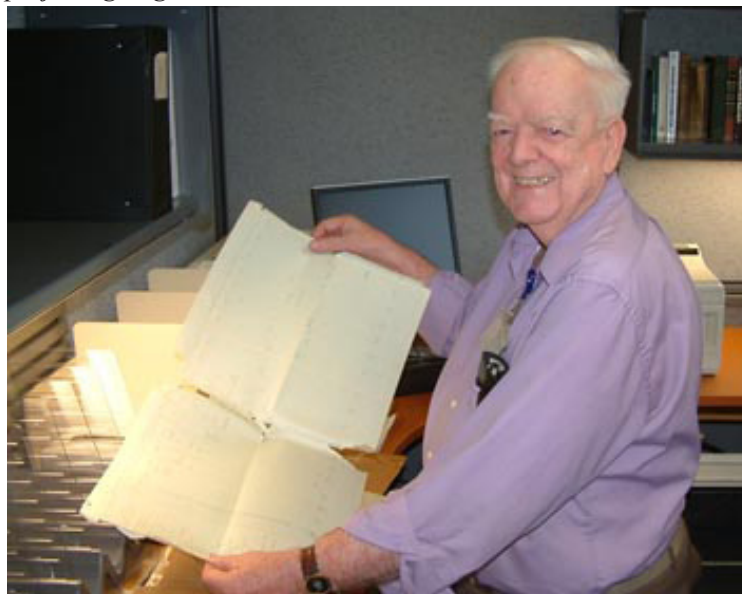
Wiley, who has worked for six State Conservationists, says his longevity in the agency is due to a history of good relationships with his supervisors and an ongoing love of his work. "I set a goal of 50 years when I started, and I guess I've stuck to the goal. I get a lot of diversity in my job—it's different every day. A lot of people just look at it as a job, but I look at it as improving the environment. Unless you have that goal in mind, it is just a job."

Kevin Brown Named Tennessee Tech Alumni Association's 2009 College of Agriculture and Human Services Alumnus of the Year

State Conservationist Kevin Brown has been named the Tennessee Tech Alumni Association's 2009 College of Agriculture and Human Services Alumnus of the Year. The award is given annually to individuals who have established themselves at the top of their professions and in their communities and who have brought honor and pride to the University and their College. He will be honored in February along with the other College Alumnus of the Year recipients at a ceremony at the Leslie Town Centre in Cookeville. Last year the Tennessee Tech College of Agriculture and Human Services named NRCS Associate Chief Dana York as the 2008 Alumnus of the Year.



Photo above: Wiley Scott's wife and daughter watch as he accepts an award from State Engineer Robert Anderson at his retirement party in December. Wiley was with SCS/NRCS for 50 years. Below: Wiley Scott displays his handwritten table of engineer projects going back to 1958.





Shelby County Hosts 12th Annual Farm Education Day

Nearly 700 attendees took part in Shelby County's 12th annual Farm Ed Day on November 7, 2008. Farm Education Day's purpose is to teach students and teachers about agriculture. This activity is directed to the local urban fifth grade audience.

A total of 513 students and 36 teachers/parents attended with 93 volunteers/exhibitors making a grand total attendance of 687 participating in this event. There were 8 Memphis City/Shelby County schools involved in this year's event.

The students and teachers received educational packets providing even more information about agriculture and its importance to society worldwide. Upon arrival, the students had class pictures made and then viewed 16 exhibits featuring corn, cotton, soybeans, honey bees, fish, forestry, safety and farm equipment and real live animals on site.

The Shelby County Soil Conservation District and the Memphis NRCS Field Office serve on the steering committee and sponsored this event from its conception.



Photo above: The Produce Exhibit with Juanita Jones of Jones Orchard demonstrating to Shelby County 5th graders.



Photo above: John Charles Wilson, Chairman of the Shelby County District, staffed the Farm Equipment and Safety Exhibit and talked with the students/teachers about the importance of agriculture.

2008 Earth Team Awards

During 2008, over 60 percent of NRCS offices utilized the assistance of over 31,000 Earth Team volunteers who donated over 812,000 hours of service nationwide. Employers, partners and volunteers all deserve recognition for these valuable contributions.

Congratulations to the FY 2008 TN

Earth Team Award Winners:

Group Volunteer Award - Progressive Agriculture Safety Day Committee, Livingston, TN

Individual Volunteer Award - Tom Pointer, Cookeville, TN

RC&D/NRCS Award - Hull-York Lakeland RC&D, Cookeville, TN

NRCS Employee Award - Todd Reed, Knoxville, TN

These awards will be presented at the TACD Annual Convention in March 2009.



Brown Attends Partners Annual Meeting



Kevin Brown and Tennessee State Forester Steve Scott visit at the Partners of the Cherokee National Forest annual meeting.

The Partners of the Cherokee National Forest, a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization whose purpose is to provide support for multiple-use forest management projects and activities in the Cherokee National Forest, held their annual meeting and fundraiser in November. Approximately 120 people attended the Hemlock Special event raising close to \$10,000 to assist in fighting the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

Kevin Brown and other agency leaders presented a synopsis of their agency activities. Others attending included Ken Arney, Deputy Regional Forester, Southern Region of USDA Forest Service; Steve Scott, State Forester, Tennessee Division of Forestry; Gary Myers, Director of Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency; Tom Speaks, Forest Supervisor, Cherokee National Forest; and Dr. Keith Belli, Department Head of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries, UT Knoxville. Other key guests were Rusty Rhea, Forest Entomologist, USDA, Forest Service and Dr. Pat Parkman, Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, UT Knoxville.



John R Freels, Jr. 1941-2006

John R. Freels, Jr., age 65 of Oneida, passed away Tuesday, January 6, 2009 at the Methodist Medical Center in Oak Ridge.

John was a 1966 Graduate of Tennessee Tech. He worked for NRCS in Oneida until his retirement in 1993. He enjoyed hunting and being around his family and friends and especially his grandkids.

He is survived by his children: Katrina Gayle Hurtt and husband, Trevor Glenn Hurtt; Joseph Ryan Freels and wife, Alice Marie Shannon Freels; and Jason Freels; his grandchildren Haley Hannah and Hayden Hurtt, and John and Shannon Freels; father, John Russell Freels; brother, James Alan Freels; sister, Janice Kay Robbins and husband, Cordell; and a host of nieces and nephews.

Moore Farm Benefits from NRCS Programs

Donna Moore and her husband Lewis operate a small cattle farm in Houston County. Donna and Lewis raise kids and cows, along with a few chickens on their property.

Since 2006, the Moores have worked with NRCS to make farm improvements and increase grazing efficiency. NRCS worked with the Moores to implement a new watering facility and heavy use area for the cattle. The water source for the watering facility is a previously abandoned well, now providing the cattle's water needs. Before installation, the Moores were using city water for the cattle. Now, the Moores' water bill has been lowered as a result of the new water source. This is just one example of how NRCS programs assist Tennessee farmers every day.





Davidson County SCD Hosts Field Day at the Hermitage

The Davidson County Soil Conservation District hosted a field day at the Hermitage, Home of Andrew Jackson. Over 100 attendees had the opportunity to view Best Management Practices constructed for erosion control and water quality.

Andrew Jackson would be proud to see how George McDonald, Davidson Co. Conservation Farmer of the Year is producing high yield row crops on the Hermitage grounds. McDonald demonstrated the use of his spray equipment for pesticide application and spoke about variable rate technology, auto-steer equipment and other tools of precision agriculture.

The cropland on the Hermitage farm had suffered over the years and many of the fields were overgrown and the pH was very low. After gaining the lease on the property, George stated, "I'm honored to be able to farm this land. I want to leave my imprint." Now, a year later with good conservation practices in place, he has done just that. It is amazing to see what he has accomplished on the 377 acres of cropland.

At the next stop, Russ Scoglan, TN Wildlife Resources Agency Manager, presented information on the 5 acre warm season grass field border planted for wildlife and erosion control.

Engineer Ralph Smith and District Conservationist Carolyn Dillard presented information about the grassed waterway construction and establishment. The 5 acre waterway project implemented by McDonald filters sediment and improves the quality of the water runoff downstream.

NRCS Grazing Land Specialist Greg Brann presented information on the rotational grazing system implemented by the Hermitage site director, Raymond Johnson. Practices included watering troughs, fence for rotational grazing and use exclusion, limited access, prescribed grazing and a warm season grass border. These practices were implemented for the belted Galloway cattle and the two donkeys that inhabit the farm.

After the tours, guests had a chance to view the many educational booths. Exhibits included: TN Ag Enhancements, TN Wildlife Resources Agency, Metro Water Dept., U.T. Extension Master Gardeners and Pesticide Lab, TN Farm Bureau, Land Trust of TN, Beef Council, TN Dept. of Agriculture, Cumberland River Compact, Century Farms, Davidson County SCD and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

John Leeman, Chairman of the Davidson SCD welcomed the group to the luncheon and introduced special guests (cont'd on page 7)



Photo above: George McDonald and Raymond Johnson talk about precision agriculture with the group.



Photo above: Kevin Brown provides an update on NRCS.



Davidson County SCD Hosts Field Day (Continued)

including speakers Kevin Brown, NRCS State Conservationist; Jim Nance, TDA Ag Resource Program Director; and Justin Bryant, Ag Enhancement Program. The Educational Award was presented to Chris Speigal, Montgomery Bell Academy. Chris has taught environmental science to his ecology classes which have excelled in the Envirothon competition for the last six years placing 1st or 2nd every year in the statewide competition.

A plaque was awarded to the Hermitage Association honoring Jeffrey Hunter, Vice President of Operations and Raymond Johnson for their conservation efforts on the Hermitage farm.

The Conservation Farmer of the Year was awarded to George McDonald for conservation practices applied at the Hermitage.

Karen Guy, full time farmer and owner of Hunter's Hill Farm was presented with the Outstanding Conservation Farmer award for her commitment to conservation. In a permanent agreement with the Land Trust of TN, Guy placed 147 acres of her farm in a conservation easement protecting it from future development, ensuring that it will remain in agricultural production.

A partnership between the Hermitage, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Davidson Co. Soil Conservation District, TN Dept. of Agriculture (TDA), and Farm Service Agency (FSA) made this project a success. The Natural Resources Conservation Service provided cost share and technical assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for practices such as precision agriculture, prescribed grazing, limited access, pipeline and watering troughs. The Farm Service Agency provided cost share assistance through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for the Grassed Waterway and the Warm Season Grass Field Borders. The TN Dept. of Agriculture provided additional cost share assistance and information and educational assistance with the program. The Davidson County SCD planned and organized the event and provided assistance as needed.

Mark Your Calendar for the 65th Annual TACD Convention

**March 1 - 3, 2009
Holiday Inn
Johnson City, Tennessee**



Photo above: Karen Guy, owner of Hunter's Hill Farm, and Carolyn Dillard, NRCS District Conservationist, answer questions from the group.



Photo above: John Leeman, Chairman, Davidson County SCD, welcomed the group to the luncheon.



Photo above: Greg Brann, NRCS Grazing Land Specialist, presented information of the grazing system implemented by Raymond Johnson, Hermitage Site Director.



NRCS Employees Retire

Thomas E. Beasley, Agricultural Engineer Retires with 40 Years of Service



Thomas E. Beasley, an Agricultural Engineer at the Union City Field Office retired on August 30, 2008 after 40 years of service.

Tom began his career with SCS in 1967 as an Engineering Trainee in Sevier Co. After completing his degree from UT Knoxville in 1969 he worked full-time in the Knox and Union Co. Field Offices. Tom returned to West TN in 1970 to work in the Project Office located in Dresden, TN. After serving in several different locations in the Jackson Area, Tom went to the Columbia Area in 1987 as Area Engineer. In 1992 Tom once again came back to West TN and worked as GR on several projects. During his career he worked on many EWP projects in state and outside of TN.

We wish Tom the best in his retirement years.

Linda J. Bierley, Soil Conservation Technician Retires with 28 Years of Service



Linda J. Bierley, a Soil Conservation Technician at the Athens Field Office retired January 3, 2009 after 28 years of service.

District Conservationist Bill Dailey says Linda always excelled in her work. "Linda enjoyed working with farmers in Meigs and McMinn Counties and the SCD boards helping them solve resource concerns," Dailey said. "She particularly enjoyed working with young people at farm field days to discuss agriculture and conservation with them."

Linda is looking forward to finishing some remodeling on her home with her husband Roy and spending more time with her grandsons.

Paul F. Bluhm, Civil Engineer, Retires with 32 Years of Service



Paul F. Bluhm, a Civil Engineer at the State Office in Nashville, retired on August 3, 2008 after 32 years of service.

State Engineer Robert Anderson says he'll miss working with Paul.

"Paul brought to us from the CORP experience in geotechnical engineering which helped us expedite dam rehabilitation efforts. Without Paul, our in-house technical ability to fully evaluate dams will be hampered as we adjust and make do. Paul's technical ability with major structures will be missed."

Paul is looking forward to having more time with his wife and children.



NRCS Employees Retire

Louis C. Boyd, District Conservationist, Retires with 32 Years Of Service



Louis C. Boyd, District Conservationist in the Clarksville Field Office, retired January 3, 2009 after 32 years of service.

He began his career with NRCS in 1977 as a Soil Conservationist in Franklin County SCS Field Office in Winchester, Tennessee. Louis became District Conservationist in Trousdale County in 1987 after working several years as a soil conservationist in Cookeville. He worked five years as Overton County's DC before transferring to the Clarksville Field Office in 1997 where he has remained until retirement.

Area Conservationist Mike Hart says, "I appreciate Louis' commitment to the NRCS mission and his ability to get things done at the local level. He will be missed."

James G. Brown, District Conservationist, Retires with More Than 36 Years of Service



James G. Brown, District Conservationist in the Springfield Field Office, retired January 3, 2009 after 36-1/2 years of service.

He began his career with NRCS in 1973 as a Soil Conservationist in Hardeman, Tennessee. He transferred to Fayette County in 1982 and to Lewis County one year later. In 1986, James became District Conservationist in Robertson County where he worked 22 years before his retirement.

Area Conservationist Mike Hart says, "We will miss James' dedication, his non-waning support of the conservation mission, and his ability to build partnerships".

Randy Parnell, District Conservationist, Retires with More Than 32 Years of Service



Randy Parnell, the District Conservationist in the Pikeville Field Office, retired from NRCS effective January 3, 2009, after more than 32 years of federal service.

He began his career as a Student Trainee in the Greeneville Field Office in 1974 and Shelbyville Field Office in 1975. Randy was hired by NRCS full-time in Brownsville in 1976. He was reassigned to Pikeville in October 1977 and has held that position until the present time.

Area 3 Conservationist Charles Roberts says everyone will miss him. "Randy was a good employee and we wish him and his family the best in retirement."



Kurios Farm Project is a Success

NRCS and the Rutherford County Soil Conservation District have partnered with All Saints Episcopal Church in Smyrna to help more than a dozen refugee families become more self-sufficient through agriculture.

The church is helping 14 refugee families, who are part of an ethnic minority known as the Karen, from Myanmar (the country formerly known as Burma.) Many of the Karen came to the U.S. with nothing except the clothes on their back, and now they are trying to establish a new life in Tennessee. When they first arrived, many of the refugees were working at a chicken factory, but Reverend Michael Spurlock and Dr. Mike Williams of All Saints Episcopal Church had the idea to convert 13 acres of land behind the church into a garden for the Karens. That's when they got together with NRCS District Conservationist Jason McAfee and the Rutherford County SCD.

With a garden the refugees could grow their own food and sell some of the surplus to supplement their income. The land had plenty of acreage for the planned project and it sat along Stewart's Creek, a wonderful water source. The church also had a covered picnic area that had not been in use for about a year that could be converted into a food market stand and a barn to house the equipment.

The Soil Conservation District board loved the idea and decided to provide financial support to the project through the Conservation Resource Outreach Program (CROP.) They donated \$500 to the project for the purchase of seed, tools, and other supplies. During the course of the meeting it was discovered that the last person to work the land for agricultural production was current SCD board member Bruce Gentry. He offered his equipment and time to assist the church in tilling and cultivating the soil.

Mr. Gentry, his brother, and a friend turned over, tilled and cultivated the soil. Several of the Karen were also there to witness the ground breaking, which for many was the first time they had seen a tractor. Mr. Gentry and the others tilled four fields for the church to initially use, with each field being 250 feet by 100 feet. The Karen planned on growing a few crops to start with. They chose to plant beans, cucumbers, lettuce, shade leaf and a native Burma pepper. While they were out there farming they also had language classes that taught them English.

The farm was a success. The Karen were surprised at how fast it all came together and were very grateful for all the help. The farm is named the Kurios Farm, which means God's Farm. To learn more about the farm, go to their blog at: <http://kurios-farm.blogspot.com/>



Photo above: Members of the 14 refugee families from Myanmar at the All Saints Episcopal Church.



Photo above: The karen planted and tilled their fields. Photo below: The farm was so successful the refugees have been able to sell some of the surplus to supplement their income.





Brown Attends SECDEA Conference

State Conservationist Kevin Brown attended the Southeast Conservation Districts Employees Association (SECDEA) conference in November along with several District Employees from Tennessee.

Pictured (l to r): Kevin Brown, Janice Weiss, Carol Edwards, Linda Marshall, Mary Gregory, Jeanette Gilliam & Sara Steelman.

Jason Luckey of Gibson County is Recipient of 2009 Delta High Cotton Award

NRCS customer Jason Luckey of Gibson County has been named the recipient of the 2009 Delta High Cotton Award. Luckey and his brother, nephew, and father farm 3600 acres near Humboldt where they grow corn, cotton, soybeans, wheat, and beef cattle. His conservation practices include creating wildlife habitats, preventing soil erosion, crop rotation, and no-till.

Luckey told the Delta Farm Press that environmental stewardship must be a priority. "We try to use everything we can--terraces, catch basins, filter strips and wildlife strips, and we diversify our crops. It's not going to make you a living if run (the land) ragged."



Photo Above: Jason Luckey, Gibson County farmer and recipient of the 2009 Delta High Cotton Award. Photo courtesy of Delta Farm Press

Grazing for Profit Conference Scheduled for Thursday February 19, 2009

Plan now to attend the "Grazing for Profit" conference featuring Greg Judy. The conference is scheduled for Thursday, February 19, 2009 at Roane State Community College in Harriman, Tennessee. The registration fee is \$25 which includes lunch.

Contact the Roane County Soil Conservation District 865-671-3830, ext. 3 to pre-register. Don't delay as this event is expected to sell out.



The Following Article is adapted from Warning: Hotels Could Be Hazardous to Your Health

by Captain RH Kauffman, Los Angeles County Fire Dept

Have you ever been in a hotel during a fire? It's a frightening experience, and you should start thinking about it. For instance, how would you have acted if you had been in one of these fires?

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| The Thomas Hotel, San Francisco, Ca | 20 DEAD |
| The Gulf Hotel, Houston, Texas | 54 DEAD |
| The La Salle Hotel, Chicago, Ill | 61 DEAD |
| The Wincoff Hotel, Atlanta, Ca | 119 DEAD |

Of course, there have been hundreds more with thousands of deaths, but I think you're getting the drift. The majority of those people did not have to die.

My wife has been in the airline industry close to 8 years and while accompanying her on a trip recently, I learned how ill-prepared she was for a hotel fire. It's not her fault: it's quite common. Hotels, however, have no excuse for being ill-prepared, but believe me, you cannot depend on the staff in case of a fire. History has shown some hotels won't even call the fire Department. I have been a fire-fighter in Los Angeles for over 10 years and have seen many people die needlessly in building fires. It's sad because most could have saved themselves.

Contrary to what you have seen on television or in the movies, fire is not likely to chase you down and burn you to death. It's the by-products of fire that will kill you. Super heated fire gases (smoke) and panic will almost always be the cause of death long before the fire arrives if it ever does. This is very important. You must know how to avoid smoke and panic to survive a hotel fire. With this in mind, here are a few tips:

Smoke

Where there is smoke, there is not necessarily fire. A smoldering mattress, for instance, will produce great amounts of smoke. Air conditioning and air exchange systems will sometimes pick up smoke from one room and carry it out to other rooms or floors. You should keep that in mind because 70% of the hotel fires are caused by smoking and matches. In any case, your prime objective should be to leave at the first sign of smoke.

Smoke, being warmer, will start accumulating at the ceiling and work its way down. The first thing you'll notice is THERE ARE NO "EXIT" SIGNS. Keep in mind when you have smoke, it's too late to start looking for "exit" signs.

Another thing about smoke you should be aware of is how irritating it is on the eyes. The problem is your eyes will only take so much irritation then they close. Try all you want, you won't be able to open them if there is still smoke in the area. It's one of your body's compensatory mechanisms. Lastly, the fresh air you want to breathe is at or near the floor. Get on your hands and knees (or stomach) and STAY THERE as you make your way out. Those who don't probably won't get far.

Think about this poor man's predicament for a moment: He wakes up at 0230 hrs to a smell of smoke. He puts on his trousers and runs into the hallway only to be greeted by heavy smoke. He has

no idea where the exit is. He runs to the right. He's coughing and gagging, his eyes hurt. "Where is it?" "WHERE IS IT?" Panic begins to set in. About the same time he thinks maybe he is going the wrong way, his eyes close. He can't find his way back to his room (it wasn't so bad in there). His chest hurts, he desperately needs oxygen. Total panic sets in as he runs in the other direction. He is completely disorientated. He cannot hold his breath any longer. We find him at 0250. DEAD

What caused all the smoke? A small fire in a room where they store the roll-away beds. Remember, the presence of smoke does not necessarily mean the hotel is burning down.

Panic

Panic is a sudden, overpowering terror often afflicting many people at once. Panic is the product of your imagination running wild and it will set in as soon as it dawns on you you're lost, disorientated, or you don't know what to do. Panic is almost irreversible: once it sets in, it seems to grow. Panic will make you do things that could kill you. People in a state of panic are rarely able to save themselves.

If you understand what's going on, what to do, where to go, and how to get there, panic will not set in. The man in the example I used would not have died if he had known what to do. For instance, had he known the exit was to the left and 4 doors down on the left, he could have gotten on his hands and knees where there was fresh air and started counting doorways. Even if he couldn't keep his eyes open, he could feel his way as he crawled, counting the doors. 1... 2... 3... BINGO! He would NOT have panicked. He would be alive today, telling of his "great hotel fire" experience.

Exits

The elevator drops you at the 12th floor and you start looking for your room. "Let's see ... room 1236 ... here it is". You open the door and drop your luggage. AT THAT VERY MOMENT, turn around and go back into the hallway to check your exit. You may NEVER get another chance. Don't go into the bathroom, open the curtains, turn on the TV, smarten your appearance, or crash out on the bed. I know you're tired and you want to relax, but it's absolutely essential...no...CRITICAL that you develop the HABIT of checking for your exit after you drop your luggage. It won't take 30 seconds, and believe me, you may NEVER get another chance.

If there are two of you sharing a room, BOTH of you locate your exit. Talk it over as you walk towards it. Is it on the left or right... do you have to turn a corner? Open the exit door ... what do you see ... stairs or another door? (Sometimes there are 2 doors to go through, especially in newer hotels.)

I'd hate to see you crawl into a broom closet thinking it was the exit! Are you passing any rooms where your friends are staying? If there was a fire, you may want to bang on their doors as you go by. Is there anything in the hallway that would be in your way... an ice-machine maybe? As you arrive back at your room, take a look once more. Get a good mental picture of what everything looks like. Do you think you could get to the exit with a "blind-fold" on?



This procedure takes less than one minute and to be effective, it must become a habit. Those of you who are too lazy or tired to do it consistently are real “riverboat gamblers”. There are over 5,000 hotel fires per year. The odds are sure to catch up with you.

Using the Exit

Should you have to leave your room during the night, it is important to close the door behind you. This is very effective in keeping out fire and will minimize smoke damage to your belongings.

There was a house fire in Los Angeles recently where an entire family died. It was a 3 bedroom house with a den and family room. That night, the occupants had left every door in the house open except one, and it had led to the washrooms where the family dog slept. The house, except for the washroom, was a total loss. When the fire was knocked down, firemen opened the door to find the family dog wagging his tail. Because the door was left shut, the dog and room were in fine shape.

Some doors take hours to burn through. They are excellent “fire stops” so close every door you go through. If you find smoke in the exit stairwell, then people are leaving doors open as they enter.

Always take your key with you. Get into the habit of putting the key in the same place every time you stay in a hotel. Since every hotel has night stands, that’s an excellent location. It’s close to the bed so you can grab it when you leave without wasting time looking for it. It’s important you close your door as you leave, and it’s equally as important that you don’t lock yourself out.

You may find conditions in the hallway untenable and want to return to your room. If you’re now in the habit of checking your exit and leaving the room key on the night stand, you’re pretty well prepared to leave the hotel in case of a fire, so let’s “walk” through it once.

Something will awake you during the night. It could be the telephone, someone banging on the door, the smell of smoke, or some other disturbance. But, whatever it is, investigate before you go back to sleep. A popular “Inn” near LAX recently had a fire and one of the guests later said he was awakened by people screaming but went back to bed thinking it was a party. He darn near died in bed.

Let’s suppose you wake up to smoke in your room. Grab your key off the night stand, roll off the bed and head for the door on your hands and knees. Even if you could tolerate the smoke by standing, DON’T. You’ll want to save your eyes and lungs for as long as possible. BEFORE you open the door, feel it with the back of your hand (as it is more sensitive than the palm of your hand). If the door is quite hot, don’t open it. The fire could be just outside. We’ll talk about that later. With the back of your hand still on the door (in case you need to slam it shut), slowly open the door and peek into the hallway to “assess conditions”.

As you make your way to the exit, stay against the wall on the side where the exit is. It is very easy to get lost or disorientated in a smoky atmosphere. If you’re on the wrong side of the hallway, you might crawl right on by the exit. If you’re in the middle

of the hall, people who are running will trip over you. Stay on the same side as the exit, count doors as you go.

When you reach the exit and begin to descend it is very important that you WALK down and hang onto the handrail as you go. Don’t take this point lightly. The people who will be running will knock you down and you might not be able to get up. Just hang on and stay out of everyone’s way. All you have to do now is leave the building, cross the street and watch the action. When the fire is out and the smoke clears, you will be allowed to re-enter the building. If you closed your room door when you left, your belongings should be in pretty good shape.

Smoke will sometimes get into the exit stairway. It’s a tall building, this smoke may not rise very high before it cools and becomes heavy. This is called “stacking”. If your room is on the 20th floor, for instance, you could enter the stairway and find it clear. As you descend you could encounter smoke that has “stacked”. Do not try to “run through it” - people die that way. Turn around and walk up. Now you must really hang onto the handrail. The people running down will probably be glassy-eyed and in a panic and will knock you right out of your socks!

They will run over anything in their way, including a fireman, but hang on and keep heading up towards the roof. If for some reason you try one of the doors to an upper floor and find it locked, that’s normal, don’t worry about it. Exit stairwells are designed so that you cannot enter from the street or roof. Once inside, however, you may exit at the street or roof but cannot go from floor to floor; this is done for security purposes. When you reach the roof, prop the door with something. This is the ONLY time you will leave a door open. Any smoke in the stairwell may now vent itself to the atmosphere and you won’t be locked out. Now find the windward side of the building (the wet finger method is quite reliable), have a seat and wait until they find you. Roofs have proved to be a safe secondary exit and refuge area. Stay put. Firemen will always make a thorough search of the building looking for bodies. Live ones are nice to find.

Your Room

After you check your exit and drop the key on the night stand. There is one more thing for you to do. Become familiar with your room. See if your bathroom has a vent; all do, but some have electric motors. Should you decide to remain in your room, turn it on to help remove the smoke. Take a good look at the window in your room. Does it open? Does it have a latch, a lock? Does it slide? Now open the window (if it works) and look outside. What do you see? A sign or ledges? How high up are you? Get a good mental picture of what’s outside, it may come in handy. It’s important you know how to OPEN your window; you may have to close it again. Should you wake up to smoke in your room and the door is too hot to open or the hallway is completely charged with smoke, don’t panic. Many people have defended themselves quite nicely in their room and so can you. One of the first things you’ll want to do is open the window to vent the smoke. I hope you learned how to open it when you checked in. It could be dark and smoky in the room. Those who don’t will probably throw a chair through the window. If there is smoke outside and you have no window



to close, it will enter your room and you will be trapped. The broken glass from the window will cut like a surgeon's scalpel. Don't compound your problems. Besides, if you break out your window with a chair, you could hit a fireman on the street below.

If there is fresh air outside, leave the window open, but keep an eye on it. At this point, most people would stay at the window, waving frantically, while their room continues to fill with smoke, if the fire burns through. This procedure is not conducive to longevity. You must be aggressive and fight back. Here are some things you can do in any order you choose ... if the room phone works, let someone know you're in there. Flip on the bathroom vent. Fill the bath with water. (Don't get into it - it's for fire fighting. You'd be surprised how many people try to save themselves by getting into a tub of water - that's how you cook lobsters and crabs, so you know what happens!) Wet some sheets or towels, and stuff the cracks of your door to keep out the smoke.

With your ice-bucket, bail the water from the bath onto the door to keep it cool. Feel the walls - if they are hot, bail water onto them too. You can put your mattress up against the door and block it in place with the dresser. Keep it wet - keep everything wet. Who cares about the mess. A wet towel tied around your nose and mouth is an effective filter if you fold it in a triangle and put the corner in your mouth. If you swing a wet towel around the room, it will help clear the smoke. If there is a fire outside the window, pull down the curtains and move everything combustible away from the window. Bail water all around the window. The point is, there shouldn't be any reason to panic - keep fighting until reinforcements arrive. It won't be long.

Elevators

There isn't an elevator made that can be used as a "safe" exit. In all states, elevators by law cannot be considered an "exit". They are complicated devices with a mind of their own. The problem is people only know one way out of a building - the way they came in, and if that was the elevator, they are in trouble. Elevator shafts and machinery extends through all floors of a building, and besides, with the shaft filling with smoke, there are hundreds of other things that could go wrong and probably will. Everyone tries to get on the elevator in an emergency. Fights break out and people get seriously injured. Smoke, heat and fire do funny things to elevator call buttons, controls, etc

Case in point: Hotel guests in a New Orleans hotel were called on their room phones and notified of a fire on the upper floors. They were in no danger, but asked to evacuate the hotel as a precaution. Five of the guests decided to use the elevator. It was discovered later that the elevator only went down about three floors and then for some reason started going up. It did not stop until it reached the fire floor. The doors came open and were held open by smoke obscuring the photo cell light beam. Besides the five guests in the elevator who died of suffocation, firemen noticed that every button had been pushed, probably in a frantic attempt to stop the elevator.

Fires have killed many people, including firemen. Several New York firemen recently used an elevator when responding to a fire up on the 20th floor. They pushed 18, but the elevator went right on by the 18th floor. The doors came open on the 20th floor to an inferno and remained open long enough to kill all the firemen. he

doors then closed and the elevator returned to the lobby. Hand operated elevators are not exempt. Some elevator operators have been beaten by people fighting over the controls. If you have any idea that there might be smoke or fire in your hotel, avoid the elevator like the plague.

Jumping

It's important I say something about jumping because so many people do it. Most are killed or injured in the process. I cannot tell you whether or not you should jump. Every fire, although similar, is different. I can tell you, however, what usually happens to "jumpers". If you're on the 1st floor, you could just OPEN the window and climb out. From the second floor you could probably make it with a sprained ankle, but you must jump out far enough to clear the building. Many people hit window sills and ledges on the way down, and they go into cartwheels. If they don't land on their head and kill themselves, they're injured seriously. If you're any higher than the 3rd, the chances are you won't survive the fall. You would probably be better off fighting the fire. Nearby buildings seem closer than they really are and many have died trying to jump to a building that looked 5 feet away, but was actually 15 feet away.

Panic is what causes most people to jump. There was a fire in Brazil a few years ago where 40 people jumped from windows and all 40 died. Ironically, 36 of those jumped after the fire was out. Many people have survived by staying put whilst those around them jumped to their death. If you can resist panic and think clearly, you can use your own best judgment.

Calling the Fire Department

Believe it or not, most hotels will not call the fire department until they verify whether or not there really is a fire and try to put it out themselves. Should you call the receptionist to report a fire, they will always send the bellhop, security guard, or anyone else that's not busy to investigate. Hotels are very reluctant to "disturb" their guests and fire engines in the streets are quite embarrassing and tend to draw crowds.

In the New Orleans hotel fire, records show that the fire department received only one call, from a guest in one of the rooms. The desk had been notified of fire 20 minutes earlier and had sent a security guard to investigate. His body was later found on the 12th floor about 10 feet from the elevator.

Should you want to report a fire or smell of smoke, ask the hotel operator for an outside line for a local call. Call the fire department and tell them your room number in case you need to be rescued. You need not feel embarrassed, that's what we're here for. We would much rather come to a small fire or smoking electrical fire that you smelled than be called 20 minutes later after 6 people have died. Don't let hotel "policy" intimidate you into doing otherwise. The hotel may be a little upset with you, but who cares. The fire department will be glad you called: you may have saved many lives. Besides, it's a great way for us to meet people!

The rest is up to you. Only you can condition yourself to react in a hotel emergency. You can be well prepared by developing these habits.